**“Friends and Neighbors” TALK Series**

**Book Descriptions**

***A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman**

In *Ove*, author Fredrik Backman creates a loveable curmedgeon. Ove, a recent widower and forced retiree, likes things to be orderly and fair. He spends his days as self-appointed neighborhood watch overlord in his Swedish housing complex making sure bicycles remain in designated-only areas and sheds are securely locked—orderly. He’s the type of guy who goes out of his way to ensure that a tailgating Mercedes misses out on a prime parking space near the mall by physically blocking the space with his Saab (the only brand of car that people should drive)—fair. New neighbors disrupt his world, beginning with knocking over his mailbox, driving over his flowerbed (cars belong in the parking lot not on lawns), and bringing him dinner as an apology.

***Five Skies* by Ron Carlson**

“And so their days ended with this regard for their tools and the days began, as they squinted over coffee, in the exhilarating open air knowing where the shovel was, the chain, the awl.’ Author Ron Carlson writes movingly about male friendships in a work selected by the National Endowment for the Arts for its Big Read. This book is about three strangers, each with a scarred past, who come together for a summer to construct a motorcycle ramp over a canyon gorge in the Idaho Rockies. The foreman looks for a way around his grief after the sudden death of his wife; the project engineer seeks to overcome his guilt over the death of his brother in a poorly planned Hollywood stunt. They are joined by a runaway teen with a history of petty crime. Carlson chronicles how the trio immerse themselves in their work in search of salvation and become friends along the way. The majesty of nature is as much a character as the three men.

***The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengestu**

“I was hit with the sudden terrible and frightening realization that everything I cared for and loved was either lost or living on without me seven thousand miles away, and that what I had here was not a life, but a poorly constructed substitution made up of one uncle, two friends, a grim store, and a cheap apartment,” states Ethiopian shopkeeper Sepha Stephanos of his life in Washington, DC. This NEA Big Read pick follows Stephanos as he chronicles his life in the rapidly gentrifying DC neighborhood of Logan Circle and his path to there from war-torn Ethiopia as a young man in the 1970s. The story is about the pain of exile, a changing neighborhood, and friendships forged and lost. While his friendship with two other African immigrants, “Joe from the Congo” and “Ken the Kenyan” help ease his transition and sustain him through the years, it is the companionship of Judith a history professor who renovates the four-story mansion next door to his shop and her bi-racial, eleven-year old daughter Naomi that transform his world into something hopeful.